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RR RUEHWEB

DE RUEHIN #0843/01 0740617
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
R 150617Z MAR 06
FM AIT TAIPEI
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 9087
INFO RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 4862
RUEHHK/AMCONSUL HONG KONG 6051

UNCLAS AIT TAIPEI 000843

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E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [OPRC](#) [KMDR](#) [KPAO](#) [TW](#)
SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION: U.S. AND CROSS-STRAIT RELATIONS

¶1. Summary: On the day marking the first anniversary of China's passage of its "Anti-Secession Law," Taiwan's major Chinese-language dailies focused their coverage on the call for a new investigation into the 319 shooting incident, and other local issues. The pro-independence "Taiwan Daily" ran a banner headline on its page two that read: "Cessation of the National Unification Council (NUC) and National Unification Guidelines (NUG) Are Accurate [Moves]; the President Will Be Happy to Brief the Legislative Yuan [about the NUC and NUG Matter]." Also, the pro-independence "Liberty Times," Taiwan's biggest daily, and pro-independence "Taiwan Daily" both carried in their inside pages an opinion survey conducted by the ruling DPP that reported that in the face of China's increasing military buildup, 50 percent of those polled said they support Taiwan independence, while 29 percent said they support unification with China, and 13 percent said they support maintaining the status quo.

¶2. In terms of editorials and commentaries, Lin Chong-pin, professor at Tamkang University's Graduate Institute of International Affairs & Strategic Studies, opined in the mass-circulation "Apple Daily" that it is very important for Taiwan to have a clear and accurate understanding of the "Anti-Secession Law" -- that is, China wants to use economic, cultural and social forces to achieve its goal of unification with Taiwan, and the use of force will be its last resort. An editorial in the limited-circulation, conservative, pro-unification, English-language "China Post" pointed out that the NUC drama has served "a sobering lesson" to Chen - namely, "the island has many options for the future but it has no choice at all."

A "Taiwan Daily" editorial marked the first anniversary of China's passage of the "Anti-Secession Law" by calling for Taiwan to move towards "de jure independence." An editorial in the limited-circulation, pro-independence, English-language "Taiwan News" said the United States, instead of reining in Taiwan, should encourage Taiwan to speak the truth about China's rise. End summary.

A) "Seeing the True Face of the Anti-Secession Law Clearly"

[circulation: 500,000] (3/14):

"Beijing passed the 'Anti-Secession Law' exactly one year ago from today. The move upset all of the Taiwan people, and countries such as the United States and Japan also viewed it seriously. One month later [following China's move], [U.S. President] George W. Bush went to the European Union and used the 'Anti-Secession Law' to successfully convince the latter not to lift its arms embargo on China. But the shrill reactions from all sides [towards China's move] have actually covered up the true face of the 'Anti-Secession Law.' ...

"Judging from Beijing's practices toward Taiwan following the

passage of the 'Anti-Secession Law,' or the wording of the statutes themselves and the contents of the law, [it is Qident that] the focus of the law is to use economic, cultural and social forces to achieve the goal of [China-Taiwan] unification. ... Beijing's increasingly strengthened military power will only be used as a backing, not a vanguard force, for its non-military tools - foreign relations, economy, and culture - [to push for unification with Taiwan]. ... Using force to attack Taiwan will be Beijing's last resort.

"[As a result,] Taiwan's military strength must be maintained appropriately. Taiwan must have clear national defense objectives: namely, for the short term, it needs to have sufficient military power so as to sustain itself until the U.S. military comes to Taiwan's rescue; and in the long run, it needs to have sufficient military strength as the backing for the island to engage in cross-Straits negotiations, or the United States will make repeated demands on Taiwan. Taiwan still has many opportunities and hopes. But the top priority is that we must objectively and rationally assess the overall climate we are in and work out a consensus. ... Having a clear and accurate understand of the 'Anti-Secession Law' should be the most important matter for Taiwan on the first anniversary of the passage of the law."

B) "Many Options, But No Choice"

The conservative, pro-unification, English-language "China Post" [circulation: 30,000] editorialized (3/14):

"Reports from Washington indicate that the Bush administration has opted to accept at face value President Chen's explanations and 'move on' from his controversial scrapping of the National Unification Council (NUC). ... By closing the chapter in a whimper, Washington has done a huge favor to Chen again. But the president and the ruling Democratic Progressive Party are not allowed the pleasure and sense of achievement of ruling out reunification with the mainland as an option for Taiwan. The U.S. gives them nothing to celebrate about loudly in public, lest it irritates Beijing further to prompt harsher punishment from Washington. That's the message brought by Richard Armitage, a former U.S. deputy secretary of state, last week.

"Thus Chen's wish of building a de-unification legacy remains incomplete. The NUC drama, however, has served a sobering lesson to Chen and his fellow promoters of Taiwan independence. It highlighted the cruel reality that the island has many options for the future but it has no choice at all. ... Taiwan's status quo, 'a self-ruled, democratic Chinese non-state,' as defined by the powerful, is not the result of Taiwan's choice but an imposed fate. China has been a reluctant subscriber to this arrangement because it does not have the power to overturn it. The island also does not have the capability to maintain or change the unreasonable status quo. The latest episode clearly shows that even if Taiwan 'unilaterally' changed it, as Chen just did rhetorically, it couldn't stand for long. ..."

C) "[Taiwan's] Anti-Aggression Day Marks the [Island's] Crisis of Being Invaded by a High-handed Neighbor; [Taiwan] Should Move Toward 'De Jure Independence' by Rectifying Its Name and Writing a New Constitution, in an Attempt to Deter China's Invasion"

The pro-independence "Taiwan Daily" [circulation: 100,000] asserted in an editorial (3/14):

"... We thus need to remind the masters of Taiwan that despite their different political stands and ethnic groups, they must stay on high alert and be cautioned: given the current climate inside and outside Taiwan, only when all the 23 million Taiwan people unite together to say 'No' to China and tell the international community that Taiwan is not part of China can Taiwan safeguard its democracy, freedom and prosperity. Only by doing so can Taiwan maintain the basic human rights of its entire population and their descendents. ..."

D) "Taiwan Needs to Warn World of China's Rise"

The pro-independence, English-language "Taiwan News" [circulation: 20,000] editorialized (3/14):

"... Although maintaining the status quo has been U.S. policy in the region, the rise of China's economic and military clout has already considerably shaken and undermined the balance of forces and influence across the Taiwan Strait compared to six years ago. In this context, President Chen Shui-bian's February 27 decision to 'cease the operations' of the long-dormant National Unification Council and 'cease the application' of the National Unification Guidelines can be seen as a counter stroke directed against the emerging Communist party-pan KMT camp alliance. ...

"The U.S. has to face the reality that the rise of the PRC threatens to become a grave negative force for instability in the Asia-Pacific region in a manner worryingly reminiscent of the similar 'economic and military' rise of an intensely nationalistic Japanese state a century ago. This danger cannot be 'risk managed' by compelling Taiwan to remain passive and silent while our democracy and the right of our 23 million people to make a free choice on our future is increasingly threatened. Instead of being 'reined in,' Taiwan's democratically elected government should be encouraged to speak the truth by the United States, if the latter is to continue to lay any claim to be the leader of a world 'democratic' camp."

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